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LIBERALITY IN THOUGHT.

Oration by F. M. OSTRANDER, delivered at the Junior Exhibition, May 14th, 1875.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

There appear to be inherent qualities in the nature of man which predispose him to oppose all new theories.

Superstitious, he is often afraid to accept a new truth lest it might conflict with some revered principles, which he has no reason to defend, save that his forefathers adopted them.

Selfish, he will not endorse theories which he knows to be true, because they would interfere with his personal gratifications.

Stubborn, he will allow neither justice or reason to penetrate the crust of prejudice which early training has formed about his inner soul.

Placing infinite faith in the old maxim, "So many men, so many minds," he believes the majority of mankind to be in the right, and so lazily floats down the stream of life without making an effort to leave the common popular channel himself, but pulling back, and holding down those who would.

The result is, that no new truth has ever been established, without first fighting against this ignorant, superstitious, popular, anti-progressive multitude, which has often, shamefully often, crushed it entirely, only to allow it to rise again after the lapse of centuries if ever.

The noblest, wisest men that have ever lived, underwent the most horrid persecutions, and suffered the cruellest deaths, for the very truths which we are this day enjoying. The victims of a narrow-minded people who supposed that their popular theories were infallible.

To us it seems almost incredible, that such things ever could have taken place. Nevertheless they did, and are—no! they are not repeated to-day. We no longer kill men outright for uttering their doctrines, cowardly, we allow them to live physically, only that we may persecute them socially. In many respects we are just as narrow minded as we were two thousand years ago. Just as jealous of our pet theories; just as impatient at having them contradicted by these new fangled humbugs, as we term them. Now is this right? Is this the true way to engender progress? Is this justice to ourselves, or charity to mankind? But how are we to help it? By encouraging individuality and liberality of thought, which will result in broad-thinking men. Aye, but you say, "We are too liberal already; too many weak, worthless doctrines are being cast upon the public, deluding our young and weak-minded people from their proper duties, and thus proving a loathsome bane to society; there should be some measure taken to prevent these doctrines from being thus sown broad-cast among our young men." Aye, my friends, but these doctrines are here, and we must abide them. That many of them are dangerous, there is not a doubt; that many of them are partly false there is no doubt; but that they are wholly false there is a doubt; and in this case they

must be sifted, thoroughly sifted; if there is a grain of truth in them, humanity demands it, and in the name of humanity it must be found. In handling the pitch we may be more or less defiled; but individual worth must give way when the good of mankind demands it. As the soldier may fall while battling for his country, so we may fall while battling for the truth. One favor we ask: Don't misinterpret the enemies' strength to us. Don't wall us in with false prejudices and narrow habits. Let us go to battle unhampered by harassing doubts and fears, and we pledge you, that truth shall stand forth stronger and brighter than ever before.

Ladies and Gentlemen, many of you are saying at this moment, "Young man, don't be too liberal for your own welfare."

This is impossible! We may be too narrow-minded for our own welfare, but we cannot be too liberal minded. Now that we have made this bold assertion, it remains for us to prove it.

In the first place, let us fully understand each other what is meant by liberal minded men.

The botanist chooses a flower which has all the parts a flower can have, and uses it as a typical flower by which he analyzes all others.

Let us assume the same privilege with our liberal mind. We will find one that is perfect, and use it as a typical mind by which we may compare all others.

We find that our typical mind has three parts; reason, justice and charity. Hence one who lays claim to a liberal mind must consent to discuss the most diverse subjects upon the neutral grounds of reason, justice and charity. Upon this basis let us proceed to analyze some of our so-called liberal minded men, and ascertain if we can, where they really belong in the category of mankind. First, we will take one who is popularly supposed to be the most liberal of all mankind, namely—the atheist. He denies the existence of God—ungraciously denies his Creator; He who gives him breath to utter the denial. He assures his brother that he has no soul, and is consequently no better than his dog. Is this charity? He walks out into the field by day, and beholds all nature smiling about him; his eye rests upon yon generous oak, the birds in it gladden his ears with the sweetest music; he looks over the fields, and beholds the school-children romping noisily home from school; at his feet, he beholds the flowers springing into existence; all about him is activity and life, from the tiny floweret at his feet, to yon grand old oak; the birds, the school-children, the singing birds, and all working in harmony. Yet he says: "There is no God." The sun descends behind the mountain tops; how he lights up the dark heavy clouds; how he caresses the flowers from those rugged hills, causing them to blush with pleasure; and how he seems to halt just for a moment on yonder mountain top, as if on purpose to kiss each school-child, each brook and lake, each great strong tree and trembling flower, a sweet good night, as he passes on to gladden life in another world. Is there no God? *Is this all chance?* Now

all is still—so still; silently, one by one the stars appear, and soon the whole heavens are studded with brilliants. He sees them, he knows the movements which they make, their complicated systems, and with what precision they travel, and ascribes it all to chance.

"There is no God," he says. Since he disbelieves in the existence of God, he rejects the Bible, and would burn a book whose teachings are the very corner stone of civilization. In doing this would he not be doing a great injustice to the world? Have we not shown that the atheist, instead of being the broad, liberal minded man that we supposed him to be, is the very opposite, possessing a mind too little, cramped, conceited, to entertain a thought so grand as that which pertains to an infinite God? He is unwittingly the greatest enemy to true liberality of thought, in that he implies that it is that which it certainly is not. The mistake lies in the fact that we are liable to make extravagant assertions for liberal and great thoughts.

There are a great many young men, who being ashamed to think like other people, because they think that it shows a lack of better sense than the mediocrity possess, have come to the conclusion to become infidels and atheists. When remonstrated with, they will put on an air of great superiority and assert that they are liberal thinkers. You have all heard young men assert their infidelity, when they could not bring forth a single able, (much less to say original) argument to support their disbelief, and who could not repeat a dozen texts from the Bible, but who could repeat Draper's "Science and Religion" by rote, ending with, "Am not I liberal minded?" Do not chide or sneer at them, ladies and gentlemen, but *pity* them. They become sceptic through affectation and conceit. Patient study, and perfect impartiality should precede rational conviction, whether it end in faith or doubt; how many of these precocious young men are capable of standing such a test?

Concerning the infidel we have little to say. He doubts that the Bible is divinely inspired, and brings forth an army of reasons to sustain him. He may have reasons to cause him to doubt, but he is heartlessly unjust, when he would endeavor to throw down the foundation of all civilized society, and devoid of charity, for wishing to deprive the Christian of his dearest comfort. Thus, of the three requisites for a liberal mind, he has one, namely—reason; but wanting in justice and charity.

The Christian believes in a Supreme Being, and accepts the Bible as divine. The very nature of this work teaches him to be reasonable, just and charitable, and the true Christian should be so. But there are many who are true Christians, in the common acceptance of the term, who are the very opposite, being unreasonable, unjust, and uncharitable, all of which redounds to their own injury, for between their doctrine and that of the atheist there are hundreds of theories, all of which contain more or less truth, deserving and demanding impartial discussion. Why should they hesitate to discuss

sentiments and passions seem to prevail over those we admire in the nobler man.

So much for the elements which go to make up the character of Aurora Leigh; now, as to the character as a whole, and the design and success of Mrs. Browning in its production.

As we study the character there is developed a certain masculinity or strength, we might almost say *bitterness* of feeling that drowns within us the tenderer and nobler sympathies that naturally arise for a mild and sympathetic nature.

The performance of certain noble and charitable acts, we cannot feel comes from the ungoverned generosity of the heart, but rather from a cold calculating sense of moral duty. In short the character has far too much of the chilling Puritan about it to be what it essays to be, namely, Italian. Aurora Leigh lacks the impulsiveness, the fervor of feeling, the delicate sensibility of the Italian character, though Mrs. Browning has evidently endeavored to have her throw off the characteristics of her English descent and take upon herself only the Italian characteristics of her parentage. Aurora is made to love Italy, its people, its scenes, and to show special regard for her Italian blood and descent. She is made to love her father with a sort of love that seems to arise from the circumstance of his marriage with an Italian girl, rather than with a filial love. She is made to scorn her English friends; to see no beauties in English landscapes, but only its fogs and more gloomy aspects. And yet the character of Aurora Leigh is essentially English, and, moreover, the gloomiest kind of English.

Mrs. Browning was herself too English to impart Italian characteristics, however much she may have appreciated them.

The question now arises whether Mrs. Browning was endeavoring to portray the character of Aurora Leigh as we find it, whether she was endeavoring to delineate something more noble than she really did, or whether like old Ben Jonson, she was driving at certain socialistic theories, endeavoring to impart certain precepts, in general, to write a poem that would tend to elevate her fellows; and thus looked beyond her character, leaving that to come out as best it might.

We cannot undertake to discuss all these questions, much less to settle the differences of opinion that might be founded upon them. Such a discussion would involve a most searching analysis of the complete poem and constitute a volume in itself.

From the general tone of the poem, the definiteness of the plot, and the clear cut characteristics of the various characters that go to make it up we would infer that the authoress, at least, never lost sight of her principal character, even more, that she was endeavoring to bring out the character just to about what it is. There is no room left to doubt, however, that she was also endeavoring to show the myth-like character of certain social theories, more especially that of Fourier and it is possible that there were still other objects in view.

The principal character however, seems to be the important element of the poem, and the more we study it the more we are convinced that it is the object of Mrs. Browning's chief attention, for in it is developed a wonderful sight of human nature; not such human nature, to be sure, as we delight to meditate upon but nevertheless human nature as it is, loth as we are to acknowledge it.

Not one of us but knows more or less of just such characters as Aurora Leigh, even may know ourselves to partake to a greater or less extent of certain of her peculiar characteristics.

M.

A WORD ABOUT THE "IDEAL" IN SCIENCE AND IN ART.

One of the most interesting chapters in the first volume of Mr. Lewes' "Problems of Life and Mind," is the one in which he treats of the "Ideal Construction of Science." The facts he brings forward are such as have been entirely overlooked by many, while those who have been aware of them have been too often unconscious of their significance. The thesis which the author maintains amounts simply to this. It will not do to say that science deals purely with the facts of external nature. If it did it would not be science, but pure empiricism. The laws of science are really ideal. As expressing external facts they are inadequate, and must be so. And the same holds true of the classifications that science adopts, and of the results that science predicts. Under ideal conditions the classifications would be exact and the results would occur precisely as predicted. But while nature remains such as it is, the former are inaccurate, and the latter do not follow, in complicated cases, in more than approximate accordance with the predictions.

To illustrate: the first law of motion is an ideal one. All bodies when acted on by a single force, will move in a straight line in the direction of the force, and will continue moving forever; such in effect is the statement of this law. But no one ever yet saw any body moving in a straight line, or moving under the action of a single force. The only law of motion, remarks Mr. Lewes, which experience furnishes, is that motion always takes place in the direction of the least resistance, and this is certainly not a very useful law, since in effect it does little more than to state that a body always moves in the direction towards which its motion is directed.

But notwithstanding all this, the first law of motion is a very valuable one, and the science of mechanics has need of it for uses the most practical. In fact all the other laws which the same science makes use of, are similarly ideal; and yet what science is more practical than that of mechanics.

Furthermore, when we apply this science of mechanics to astronomy, and enter upon the consideration of Celestial Mechanics, we find the same rule of ideal constructions holding. Kepler's Laws are ideal. They represent only what would be the case under certain conditions that never have been, and, in the order of nature, never will be fulfilled. No planet moves in a truly elliptical orbit, the radii vectores do not describe equal areas in equal times, the squares of the periodic times are not proportional to the cubes of the distances. But were the planets reduced to mathematical points, so as to be without mutually disturbing attractions, the law would be strictly true. In consequence, first assuming the law to be true, and then making corrections one after another for the various disturbing forces, each one of these again being determined by some other purely ideal law, the astronomer arrives at the truth by approximations.

It is unnecessary to give any further illustrations. The general fact must be evident to every student of science. The way in which we study Nature in the infinitely complicated Universe before us, consists in examining separately certain sequences of cause and effect which we observe, and in making for ourselves, to correspond with each observed sequence, an ideal universe in which that sequence alone is to be found. Then we commence to combine successively in our minds the pictures of these ideal worlds, and thus gain something like an idea of the workings of our own real Uni-

verse. In the case considered in mechanics, we first imagine that in the whole universe there exists but one body, and that one set in motion by a single impulse. Then we make a more complicated supposition and suppose two bodies, and so we proceed, being thus able to obtain very satisfactory results in practical cases.

But, to use Mr. Lewes' illustration, were we to commence even with so simple a thing as the lever to discover its laws in a special case, without the power to idealize, we should never be able to get at the truth in the case we considered, and if we did get at the truth it would be of no use to us in any other case. For the results as regards each lever would depend on conditions of friction and flexibility and molecular condition which would be of a complication simply infinite. Commencing, however, as we do at the simple, and rising by slow degrees to the complex, we obtain results that are practically accurate.

Science then is ideal. Its laws are abstractions never realized in our own experience. For we can understand our own experience only by considering it piece by piece, by logically dividing it into factors which we conceive as going to make it up. The clear setting forth of this fact, and the examination of it in all its complicated bearings is perhaps the most valuable point in Mr. Lewes' first volume, and we notice that he has also laid a great deal of stress on it in the second volume, just issued, in the discussion of the Principles of Certitude.

Now let us see if this tendency, so remarkable in Science, is not at foundation with the principle of idealization in Art. If our view is correct, the two tendencies are in reality one and the same. In studying nature we must idealize in order to understand. In giving utterance to feeling we have an irresistible desire to idealize in order to express. No train of feeling could receive its expression by the use of pure imitation of real life, for in real life every train of feeling is continually broken into by circumstances that have nothing to do with those that aroused it. In consequence when artists set about the task of expression they choose some one idea, and suit their imagery to it rather than to external reality.

Now, just as in the one case the difference between science and empiricism is made by the use of ideal constructions and laws, so in the other the difference between art and imitation is made by the use of ideal imagery and representations. And just as the usefulness of science as an instrument of investigation lies in the fact of the simplification of nature accomplished by the use of it, so the value of art lies in the fact that it furnishes a complete and uncomplicated means of expression of emotion. Both are of worth because they vary from the truth, and yet in varying keep the truth always in sight and act in reference to it.

What bearing these facts have upon the question as to whether the advance of science is or is not necessarily attended with a decline of art, it is beyond our present scope to inquire. We think, however, that if they have any value they tend to show that science and art have a deep connection, that the faculties of mind which they respectively employ have much in common, and that both in a healthy state of human progress will advance together. But this is a question that would need a separate discussion.

THE serious illness of the Collegiana man prevents any great accumulation of the "flow of soul" in this issue. He has been prevented from being as profusely funny as usual.